3110

EARLY PRAYER.

A SERMON

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THE following Sermon has been asked for by some of those who heard it. It is perhaps scarcely such a composition as is usually *published;* but if printed for private distribution, it will not be read with any purpose of unfriendly criticism; and it may, with God's blessing, do good.

3110

Is. xl. 31.

THEY THAT WAIT UPON THE LORD SHALL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH.

If the value of any gift is great in proportion as the *want* which it meets is great, and is closely felt, and presses hard upon the sources of our happiness; then certainly every one of us, who knows any thing of the history of his own heart, will be glad to listen to the instruction which shall tell him how he may "renew his strength."

This surely is the very instruction that we need. All who hear me will feel that it is so. All, save those to whom the work of self-examination in an untried work, will accept at once what I say. They will recognize here a thought already well known to them. It is the thought with which a man kneels down to pray, and with which he rises from his knees. His hope and his entreaty, when he reviews the past, and examines his doings, and compares them with what he intended, and resolved, and promised to his Maker that he would do, when last he was on his

knees, is, that he may yet be an altered man; that the future may not be like the past, such a tale of weakness and failure; but that he may yet, by God's help, "renew his strength." He prays that he may change his place; that he may rise; that the vigour and cheerfulness and courage which were in his heart when last he rose up from prayer, to renew his race, but which has all been so damped and depressed and put to shame by the humiliating experience of his weakness and instability, may be restored to him, and more than restored; so that he may serve God, as he has not yet served him. He desires to "renew his strength."

And his prayer is heard. He is taught the way to gain what he asks. "They that wait on the Lord," so it is written, "shall renew their strength." A short direction, and soon uttered. But its import is large; so large, that it contains the account, the very biography, of all those who in every age have been accepted of God. All were alike in this. In other things they differed, and most widely; but rich or poor, learned or ignorant, in this one thing they were all alike. If they fought the good fight, and went from strength to strength, then we know thus

much of their secret history; though they themselves were silent concerning it, yet we know it without their disclosure, that one and all of them, they "waited upon the Lord."

The import of the word itself, its general force, at least, may be briefly given; and the other passages of Holy Scripture where the expression is the same in the original may help us to apprehend it. Such passages are very numerous; and seem to shew us, in a very convincing manner, that the disposition of mind which is so described is something peculiarly suitable to our position in our present state of being; I may add, peculiarly acceptable in God's sight. For it is the constantly recurring description of His servants. It is the profession of the dying patriarch Jacob, as he reviews his chequered life, so remarkably contrasted with the prosperous career which he had expected, "I have *waited* for thy salvation, O Lord[a]." It is the profession of the redeemed of the Lord, in that song which the prophet Isaiah predicts that they shall sing, "In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we *waited* for Thee[b]." It is that condition of heart and

[a] Gen. xlix. 18. [b] Is. xxvi. 8.

practice, to which so many promises are made through the mouth of the Psalmist; the promise, e. g. of a timely though seemingly deferred *relief;* "The *patient abiding* of the meek shall not perish for ever[c]." The promise of *deliverance from confusion* in the face of the world; "All they that *wait* on Thee shall not be ashamed[d]." The promise of a *high place in God's kingdom;* "*Wait* on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee[e]." The promise, finally, of the *inheritance of the earth;* of the true enjoyment, i. e. of all which God hath created; all this enjoyment is reserved for the same chosen race; for that class of men, so little exalted in their own eyes, but so much the favourites of heaven; "They that *patiently abide* the Lord,"—"They that *wait* on the Lord," (so it is in the Bible version,) "they shall inherit the earth[f]."

These, then, are a few passages out of very many that might be mentioned. I have not thought it necessary to cite a larger number; but I may venture to say, that any one who will pursue the induction, will not find me to have overstated the case. It will be seen, that the

[c] Ps. ix. 18. [d] Ps. xxv. 2. [e] Ps. xxxvii. 37.
[f] Ps. xxxvii. 9.

habit of mind so described is marked with a singular interest and importance in the Holy Scriptures, and that it seems to contain in it something which is peculiarly (if I may so speak) of the nature of *Religion;* of Religion, I mean, as distinguished from other systems professing to guide and discipline the human heart. Other systems may contain much that is excellent. They have their characters. But Religion, as such, consists essentially in the devotion of a mind to a mind; in the loyal submission of one will to another will. Morality, as distinguished from Religion, looks inward, or looks round about, for motives, and for rules. Religion looks *upward* for both of these; for a law of life, and for motives of action. It looks up, moreover, to a light which is apprehended only by faith; discerned only by an eye which is purified and strengthened for that very work. And the discipline which is to give to the eye this strength and this clearness of discernment is, that it be kept looking upwards, and watching for the appearance of its object through the sky. "Though it tarry, wait for it," is therefore the very rule for the attainment of religious light; "wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not

tarry[c]." Accordingly it is observed by an excellent divine[d], that the *terms* which in Scriptural style do commonly express devotion, imply thus much; "Devotion lies in seeking God; which implieth," he says, "that God doth not presently upon any slight address discover Himself in beneficial effects answerable to our desires, but after a careful and painful continuance in our applications to Him. Devotion is expressed by 'waiting upon God;' which signifieth, that if God do not presently appear, granting our requests, we should patiently stay, expecting till He be pleased to do it in His own best time; according to that in the Psalm, 'Our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until He have mercy upon us.' He would have us, then, be *suitors*; not desisting until He, warned, and as it were excited, by our earnest importunity, pleaseth to listen, to disclose Himself, to come forth to us."

I apprehend, then, that the sustained patience, the untiring service, which is expressed in the words before us; that continual looking up, that hanging upon the eye of our Almighty Parent and Guide, that state of cheerful and affectionate watchfulness, thankful to Him for all things, thankful for the light He

[c] Hab. ii. 3. [d] Barrow, Serm. VI.

gives, whether greater or smaller; for the greater, that we may rejoice in it, and walk freely; for the less, that we may cherish it, and walk circumspectly and in fear, and so by His merciful guidance may learn all the graces which belong to His elect people; the state of mind so described, which the Scripture calls "waiting upon God," is (as I apprehend) of the very essence of Religion.

I propose then, if God permit, to make this feature of the religious life the subject of our present reflections. I should wish to present it, however, in a practical form; and as every other portion of the Christian character, each several grace, is particularly connected with some certain actions which are in fact the utterance of it, serving first to form and develop it, and then to sustain it in its bloom and vigour; so also is it in the case before us. The habit of "waiting upon the Lord" is no inactive habit. In one sense indeed it radiates through life, and is the description of the whole existence of a religious man. In another sense, it has its peculiar times, its special and appropriate works, without which the habit or disposition is but a name and a shadow. You anticipate what I would say. The acts of "waiting

upon God" are the acts of *personal devotion*. And further; the expression itself leads us to a yet more particular definition. It suggests the notion of recurring periods of devotion. He waits upon God, who, as the time comes round, is found at the appointed place; who, when his Lord is there, his Creator and Preserver, waiting for him, to receive his service and his address, his thanksgiving and his supplication, is not absent, but is duly kneeling there, to pay his homage, to commune with his Almighty Friend.

But further; I would be yet more particular, professing however to be still guided by the very words before us. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;" a promise which seems to present itself to us in peculiar connexion with those occasions, when it is our great need to "renew our strength;" not, therefore, so peculiarly when we kneel at the *close* of the day, to confess our shortcomings, and to pray for mercy and forgiveness, and preservation through the coming hours of darkness; but at that hour, rather, when we are about to *enter* upon our race for the day, to go forth upon our work, to face the enemies of our salvation, and to subdue them; to meet our spiritual dangers

from within and from without, and, by God's help, to pass through them unhurt. Then it is that this word from the Holy Scripture may seem to meet our wants, to breathe refreshment upon our soul. We press nearer to His footstool, when we hear it said, that what we desire is there; that "they who wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength."

Our *private devotions*, then, in the morning, are the point upon which I would desire to concentrate all the light which we can discern, as bearing upon the great subject before us. This is my topic; and how thankful might I well be, if I could hope that the impression made upon us all, the convictions sent home to our minds, and the effectual acting upon our hearts and wills, might be in any humble and distant proportion to the real importance of the subject!

And here I cannot but remember, that I am speaking to those who know well, as a general topic, the extreme importance of a *methodical arrangement of time*. An exact distribution of employment, the orderly recurrence of engagements, is the very atmosphere that we breathe. It is the scaffold of our system. Scarcely once in the day does

the clock strike, but it brings its new appointment with it. And more than this; if any single student desires to succeed in his pursuits, it is well known among us, even to a proverb, that a rigid apportionment of his time, quite over and above those appointments which the system makes for him, is indispensable to his success. Any province of study which is not protected by such a framework, will be pushed aside again and again, and at last will be found among the things neglected. How much more, if the employment itself is one to which the mind has naturally but little disposition; and how much more, if the indisposition has power to propagate itself, and the sense of the obligation is to be acquired only by the faithful performance of it. But to return. I am speaking, I say, to those who are familiar with the necessity of *marking out the day*; who live upon the principle, that to every thing there is a time, and to every thing its *own* time; who, while exhorted by the preacher to be punctual, to be severely scrupulous in keeping their appointments at the footstool of Almighty God, have their way smoothed to the performance of this duty, by the very ground they tread; and are

naked of excuse, O how inexcusable! if here they fail; if keeping their other appointments, they select this one to be disregarded.

May I go one step farther, and be yet more particular? I am speaking to those who are familiar, not only with a division of the day, but with the *same* division. Our day, our College day, begins with the Chapel service; on this arrangement I propose to engraft what I have now to say; and I shall endeavour, brethren, to impress upon your minds—for the encouragement of those who are already doing rightly herein, for the admonition of those who have let sloth creep over them—the importance of this one special thing; of *securing time for private prayer before the Chapel service in the morning.*

Does any one of those who hear me draw back, surprised to hear so close and practical an allusion delivered from this place? Perhaps I am wrong in supposing any one to *make* the objection; and no one, I am persuaded, will *maintain* it, who remembers what is the common history of *declension* in religious life. How does declension begin? with not seeing principles, or with neglecting acts? But I forbear. I need not, perhaps, ima-

gine you to require an apology for the subject.

I exhort you then, brethren, (well knowing indeed that with many of you what I now recommend is already a settled practice, the preacher's work, therefore, being only to encourage and confirm,) I exhort you to be unbendingly strict in assigning a given time, before our social day begins; i. e. previous to the Chapel service, to the excellent and blessed work of *private devotion*. This work will consist, as all will remember, of two parts, either of which can hardly be contemplated apart from the other; *prayer*, and the *study of God's holy word*. For these two, I exhort you, at whatever sacrifice of your present inclination, to find time, and at that period of the day, also, which I refer to. And I proceed at once to offer some reasons why we should all do so.

1. First then, it will secure its being *done*. It will effectually protect it from not being done at all. And whether this itself is a powerful reason for doing it *then*, whether it is true that not doing it *then* leads to its being *sometimes* not done at all, the day's engagements coming upon us thick and dense, one taking up another, pressing us close,

and keeping us on the run; whether this is quite an imaginary case, and one unknown to experience,—brethren, judge ye.

2. Or suppose it *done* under these circumstances; suppose it not actually driven to a nothing, but done; suppose in a later period of the morning the minutes squeezed out of some reluctant hour, or half hour; stolen away from other work which has in truth a right to those minutes, and which wants them all, and will not give them up without an angry remonstrance at your injustice, discomposing your temper, and hurrying your pace (it may be) in the very acts of sacred service. Yet suppose, I say, the service done; under such circumstances, *how* will it be done? Let conscience answer, let memory answer; *How* will it be done? What will be the nature of your homage, what the tone and style of your address? Will it be worthy of the occasion, worthy of Him who receives it, worthy of you His creature who offer it? How much will there be of meditation in such an interview? How much of that calmness, that self-chastisement in the sight of God, that crossing of the hands upon the breast, that self-collectedness, that sobriety of spirit, that severity, that humi-

liation, which belongs to such a being, and in such a presence; what will there be of "waiting on the Lord?" and then, what will there be of "renewing your strength?" You remember that engagement recorded by the Roman historian, in which his countrymen were vanquished, and he thought it sufficiently accounted for when he had told us, that the enemy had put on their armour in the morning deliberately, and on prepared limbs; his countrymen, in cold, and hurry, and exhaustion of frame. Now there is one difference in our case from the case of these soldiers; their conflict was on occasion, ours is daily. But that the armour must not be *hurriedly* put on; this surely is not less true of us than of them. And whether the picture here is truly drawn or not; whether it is true that the service of devotion, thrust on into the ground which is rightfully due to other engagements, does ever suffer as I have described it to do; lose all the best of its sweetness, its bloom, its fragrance, its refreshing power, and fill up their place with a sense of fault, a feverish discontent, a feeling of self-displeasure, and self-reproach, a feeling that we have not done our best, have not done what we could; of this let

those who hear me judge. Alas! it is true, for we have found it true; and the reason of it is not far to seek. There is such a thing as an offering being brought to the holy altar, and not accepted; because it is not our best. "Ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering; *should I accept this of your hand?* saith the Lord." "Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts." "But cursed be the deceiver which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great King, saith the Lord of Hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen[d]."

To this great King, whose name is Dreadful, let us see that we make our approach in reverence and in fear. Is it not much if He accept us at all? who are we that He should want our homage? who are we that we should be permitted to draw near, so near, and offer it? Who are we? We cannot answer. But He hath answered for us, and hath bidden us draw near with our offering. Kings bring their gold, their frankincense, or myrrh;

[d] Malachi i. 13. 8. 14.

all bring of their best. Now *we* have our treasure too. Students have their treasure, their great treasure; it is their *time;* and of that treasure, and surely the choicest portion of it, is to be brought to Him. Unsullied by earthly concerns, uninfringed by earthly engagements, it is to be brought to Him. I say, uninfringed; once give this up, begin to yield but by a hair's breadth, and where will you stop? Diminish your time of prayer by minutes, or by moments, and where will you stop? Where make your stand? You cannot say where. We may compress, till there is nothing left to be compressed. Some actions of life there are which must and will have their time, and refuse to be condensed or abridged beyond a certain point. Not so our private religious duties. They are in the highest degree elastic; alas! they are fearfully compressible. They must, therefore, be protected by us with a care and vigilance proportioned to this their singular delicacy of structure. We must assert for them that scope, that uninfringed enclosure, which they do not assert for themselves; we must mark out their territory, and protect it with the bulwark of a real purpose, and an inflexible practice. This is what tries the

man; this, which is a question between God and the conscience of a man, and where no other witness in the universe comes in. But, brethren, secret though it be, let us not be deceived. What a man soweth, that shall he also reap. If the righteous and eternal laws of God hold on their course, faithfulness in prayer will be followed, and that at once, though it may not be felt at once, by a decay of Christian grace. Stinted of nourishment, how shall we retain our power? how much less shall we "*grow* in grace," and "go from strength to strength," and "abound more and more?" If but on one single day, that which I describe comes to pass; if ever the sacred appointment of the morning, calling for us duly, calls in vain; if it is not kept duly in its own time; if then engagements coming quick and close, the hour goes by, and so the second hour, and so the morning goes, and the appointment is not kept at all; who shall answer for the issue, and say how much harm is done? If, as a good man has told us, "prayers are the bulwarks of piety and good conscience, which should be placed so as to flank and relieve one another, to-

[*] Barrow, Sermon VII.

gether with the interjacent spaces of our life; that the enemy, the sin which doth so easily beset us, may not come in between, or at any time assault us without a force sufficiently near to reach and repel him;" if this is the place and the office of prayer, what is his danger, who has let his hour of prayer go by, and walked forth into the world unarmed? Can he suspend the war, because he has suspended his precautions? Can he suspend the enemy's activity, because he has dropped his own? Can he tie up till to-morrow the world and the flesh and the devil? Can he make them less subtle adversaries for the next few hours, till to-morrow, or till the afternoon? If so, let him walk forth and take a breathing time; and for once in the year let his prayer be put off. But *if not*;—what is the inference, brethren, from the *if not*?

Now all this applies to human nature and its wants. It applies to mankind. But yet there are differences among men. All are not alike in their circumstances, in their spiritual danger, and spiritual wants. And if there is a gradation of dangers, if the need of circumspection and of an assiduous recurrence to Divine help, seems more strikingly

to belong to one condition than to another, what place in this scale shall we assign to the condition of a young man, brought away from home, with all its dear and precious influences, and set down suddenly in a new world like this; set down among those who are his equals in age, who will value him more, probably, by his pleasant companionship, than by his Christian strength; who will run with him gladly in the search for amusement, but who will do little, how little full often, to help him forward in the way that leadeth unto life. In such an atmosphere, "wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" in a place where sin may go on so long unexposed and unsuspected, may have gained so much ground upon its victim, may have so frightfully sapped the sources of his virtue and his happiness, so separated between him and his God, before any one faithful friend could know it, and admonish him in secret, and snatch him back. How many a tale of evil and sorrow, of misery and degradation to a family, hath begun in this place! how many a youth hath learned here the lessons of sin, which at home, under a father's eye and a mother's, where brothers and sisters were his com-

panions, he would not have learned! How precious then, how more than precious here, are the secret means of grace, how precious the hour of access unto the throne of God! If prayer, if constant and recurring prayer, stationed along our life, to sentinel its every stage; if this, I say, is to *every* man the secret of his strength, the only secret, so that to intermit his prayer is in so far to intermit his spiritual life; if constant communion with God is to *every* man his only hope, what is it to those who now hear me, to the young sojourners in this place?

3. Let me go one step farther. I have spoken of the early morning prayer. I have urged that it be scrupulously performed in its due hour, because this will protect it from being infringed or curtailed in the *time* that belongs to it. But let us go one step farther; and suppose it protected from this violence, only placed in a later hour; the same span of time rigidly secured to it, the same retirement and uninterrupted solitude, every outward circumstance the same, only it shall be *later in time*. Let it stand thus; and I will now say confidently, that you can as soon invert a process of nature, you can as soon transpose the dew and the sunshine, you can as soon

make sultry noon have the softness and fragrance of early dawn, as you can make it to be the same thing, whether you carry to the throne of the Most High the first-fruits of your day, or not the first. I feel that I am arguing here on that which is not the ground of argument. They who know the Christian life, know what I say. They will not contradict me when I aver, that there is a freshness, a power, a salient energy, about that prayer which is sent up to God, when it is our *first* work of heart and mind in the day, which is not found when it is not the first. For the pursuits of earth have the character of earth, and gravitate to the parent mass. They draw down the soul of man; and if you would be above them, you must be beforehand with them. True, that the secular studies of a good man are not pursuits of earth. True, that they are refined and sanctified to him, because they are all a service of God. But begun without God; begun without and before the morning's prayer, they are of earth, and not of heaven; they have not the charm to sweeten and to purify them, they have not the Spirit of God breathed over them, they are dry bones, they do not live; they have all their proper earthliness,

they do weigh down the spirit of the man, and hurt the spiritual life. Begin, then, with prayer; scrupulously begin the day with prayer. Start upon your course with that supplication, which never can have its due place but at the beginning of the course, "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin!" "Begun, continued, and ended in Thee,"—this is the stamp of a godly character on every work. This is the phylactery of our existence. It must occupy the borders of our being. It must enclose the day. But observe; the rule is precise and comprehensive. "Begun" is its first word. That day offers the best hope being continued and ended in God, which was begun in Him.

4. My brethren, if it were the preacher's privilege to draw aside for one moment the veil which covers the wheels of God's providential government; if we could disclose to you in full the history of any one moment of your being, with all that was going on therein all around you—the thought indeed is itself a contradiction, because then you would walk by sight, and not by faith; whereas the whole machinery, doubtless, has reference in fact to your real position, and bears upon you as creatures who are to walk by faith, and not

by sight;—forget the contradiction for a moment, and let me repeat; if there could be revealed to you all the forces which are at work at any one moment, bearing directly or indirectly upon you, wheel within wheel, and other wheels within them; if this could be shewn you both in the good and in the evil; on the one side, the machinery of Satan, subtle, complicated, and effective; smooth and silent, and operating through the most unsuspected media, the most innocent of your employments, but tending with a certain and unerring direction to your eternal ruin, if it takes effect; on the other side, the forces of good, i. e. the powers of God's good providence, omnipotent to protect you, if you will be protected, but not one of them independent of yourself; omnipotent to save you, not against your own will, but by bending and guiding your will; not in spite of your old and bad heart continuing, but by giving you a new one; and lastly, not without your prayers, but *through* them, as the very means by which God would lead you to lay hold on His mercy, and take it into your bosom; if this could be shewn you, what a comment would it be on the preacher's word, when he exhorts you to begin the day with

God; to take no one step into the day's employments, until you have first held due communion, and that in the closest privacy, with your Almighty Protector and Guide.

But if you believe the preacher's word; if conviction, by God's mercy, is sent home upon your mind; do not let it slide away. Fix it at once; and you know the way; act upon it at once. Carry it into practice. Make it a part of life. Do this, and persevere; and I well know you will soon have better reasons for continuing it than any which I have now set before you. For this is the very character of religious light. It is realized in experience, and in no other way. Unlike the earthly vapours, which are luminous at a distance, but when you walk into them they are gone; religious light is known to him who orders his steps in its course, while to others it is not revealed. Cherish the impression which God makes upon your heart, though by the humblest of His ministers. Act upon it, I say, at once. "I made *haste*," said a good man, reviewing the course by which he had been brought into the right way, "I made haste, and delayed not the time to keep thy commandments." Obey, and you shall learn the reasons for obedience better than

the preacher can describe them, or would be at liberty to do, if he could. "Betimes in the morning" let God "hear your voice;" early direct your prayer unto Him, and look up; you shall not look in vain.

And now let me briefly sum up what has been said. I have dwelt upon the importance of *beginning* the day with the acts of private devotion; first, because this will ensure their being performed; and secondly, because the earliest hour of the day is incomparably the *best* for such employment; the best, if we desire to perform our devotions worthily and acceptably; the best, if we desire to know their *refreshing* power upon ourselves; the best also, if we consider the spiritual *dangers* which surround us, and the singular importance of our carrying a protection with us, when first we walk forth among those dangers.

There are two other considerations which bear upon the same point, but which may be dismissed in fewer words.

5. I would allude, first, to the remarkable power which prayer has, to infuse an energy, to breathe a life into all the ensuing employments of the day. It will enable us to realize the import of that short but comprehensive expression, "serving the Lord;" to work as

under His eye, and conscious of His observation. And what the power and value is of this consciousness; how cheering it is, how sustaining to the spirit through the sultry toils of life, "the burden and heat of the day;" through laborious efforts repeated in the face of disappointment, of trying discouragements from without and from within; vexations, offences, neglects, or calumnies, difficulties and hindrances; oppressive sense of fatigue; of failure also, and that in our very best undertakings; consciousness of making so little way in the work which God hath given us to do, so little way in the warfare we have to wage with ourselves, so much of life gone by, so little of life's work done; under all these things weighing down the spirit, not now and then, but continually; not one day in the week, but seven; very precious, surely, is any consolation which can survive through these oppressing forces; very precious is the thought that we are not deserted, are not alone; that we are *under the eye of God;* that our work with all its trials, that very work with its circumstances, and no other, is *the* work which He hath given us to do, and by our performance of which He is even now judging of us, and noting the judgment down. Very enlivening is it to look up and to re-

member that He beholds us; to remember the morning communion we held with Him, to feel still that hand which touched our head with blessing, and bid us go cheerfully on our way, "for, lo! I am with thee;" to feel it still upon us, its touch giving life to our limbs, and urging us to press ever onward, that we may keep up with its invigorating impulse. This is the life of prayer. This is what the Apostle spoke of, to "pray without ceasing." This makes the day to be one continued prayer, when it is one continual conscious realizing of the covenant which began the day; just as the sunshine which lies between morning and evening is but a making good the morning's promise, a perpetuity of that first beam which darted over the horizon, and gave promise of a continued light. To know these things in their power, to live *this* life, the life of prayer; to begin the day with "renewing our strength," "waiting on the Lord," and renewing with Him our covenant, ere the works of the day and the trials of the day begin; in this strength and in this spirit to "go forth to our work and to our labour until the evening;" then, when the hour of quiet is come, to look back, to review the day, and

to see in its history the fulfilment of the morning's promise; to see that God hath been with us, shielding us in the way, and guiding our steps; to *see* this perhaps in some slight degree, to get some glimpses of it; and then for the rest, to more than see, to *believe* that it has been so; to enjoy that conviction so incomparably more precious than the evidence of sight, that which belongs to the obedient children and to none other, to throw ourselves upon His unchanging goodness, to *believe* that He hath been about our path, near us, and in us; that in the myriads of things which we could not see, His promise hath been made good; that all things have been working together for good to us; that evil which was on its way to us hath been bidden to glance aside, that good hath been brought to our door by means beyond our conceiving, by a machinery too complex to be sustained, were it not for the living Spirit that is in the wheels[1]; to *believe* all this, is itself a beatitude. To believe, is to enjoy. To believe, is to see the Invisible. It is to take our place in the invisible world, to hold true citizenship with saints and angels.

But, let him who would enjoy this beati-

[1] Ezek. i. 20.

titude so seek it, that it may be seen he is in earnest; seen, not of men, but of God. Let him come *betimes* to ask for it. Let him be early in prayer; and the prayer shall follow him through the day. Some men have tried to trace the process of this reflex action of prayer upon the heart, to refer it to cause and effect. This does not seem necessary; perhaps it is not wise. Let it be enough to observe, respecting prayer, that it has a certain astonishing power of setting every faculty of the soul at work. It calls out the man; the life, the spirit of the man; rather, it calls out the energy, the life of God which is within him. Here is cause and effect; and we will not pursue it farther. Let this be reason enough for us, to begin the day with prayer.

6. And let me, in the last place, recommend it to you by one more consideration. I am about to allude to a subject which you cannot, which I am confident you will not, regard with indifference. For it is a subject connected in the minds of many of you with much of distress and perplexity of heart. I recommend you, then, brethren, to *begin* the day with prayer, faithfully to begin with prayer, as the most likely method, under the Divine blessing, to steady your

minds, and save you from *distraction of thought*, when you meet for the social worship of the *morning Chapel*. How many a heart is with me when I touch upon this topic! How many a recollection rises up to support the preacher's appeal! And to these recollections I commit you. But if the allusion which I have made does touch upon a chord within you; if by-gone days crowd up to your vision, morning and evening, more than you can count, but each with its tale of failure, of sorrow and shame, of resolutions made when you entered the house of God, but so poorly kept, that when you rose from your knees, you dared not meet the eye of those who had knelt and prayed with you; if conscience has any record like this; and if the question now be asked, Why was it so? may this perchance be the secret, that you went into the holy place *unprepared;* that you went into God's presence unprepared. How many a precious half-hour, which might have been spent in the highest privilege which God hath given to man, has been squandered to the winds, the enemy coming in and rifling our treasures and scattering our holy thoughts, because we had not put on our armour before we came forth,

or had put it on but *hurriedly*. Now he that is wise will ponder these things. He will think of the past. He will think of the future. In all the recollections of the past, in all the hopes of an amended future,—that future which God may or may not give him,—he will find a reason why he should begin his day with God, should bring the secret, sacred firstfruits of his day to Almighty God.

And now I have done with arguments. If history could come in to bear its testimony, it would speak with more convincing power than all the pleadings in the world. But it cannot speak at full; for that would be to record the career of every soul which hath been saved, and of every soul likewise which hath sunk into perdition. The history of the saints is the history of prayer. Of the two great crowds, who at the last day shall appear on Christ's right hand and on his left; of the two great crowds (they are the same two) who even now are dividing themselves off in God's sight, going down the stream of time, but taking their place for eternity; different as the individuals are in a thousand circumstances, of age, of rank, of talent; there is yet one livery, one badge, which runs

through the crowd, found in the one crowd, wanting in the other. Prayer, assiduously persevered in, and giving the colour to their lives, is the secret cognizance of the one; prayer neglected is the mark (the *secret* mark it may also be) of the other. Have you a friend, or do you know perhaps some person, eminent for goodness, some one whom you honour, whose society is a blessing, so that you are conscious of being made better every time you are in his company; whom you go to with confidence for advice, sure that he will not lead you wrong, because his thoughts and his sentiments are redolent of Scripture; who is always cheerful, with the best sort of cheerfulness; whom you observe to be sustained under all the changes and chances of life with an evenness of mind, nothing able to shake him, or interrupt his steady course of Christian activity; do you know such an one? Allow me to draw aside the veil, and to tell you the secret of it all. *He* never told it perchance, but we know it. That man is constant in prayer. His day is begun in sacred communion with Heaven; and answerably thereto, it is continued and ended under the same holy influence.

And now turn the picture. Have you known some one whose career has not been a drawing nearer to God, but a waning off from Him. I will not fill up the picture; such a case may have been brought under your notice. But here also the secret stands revealed. Unconfessed by him whom it most nearly concerned, we know it nevertheless without his confession. He ceased to be constant in prayer. There was a time when engagements pressed upon him to thrust aside his stated prayer. It was his hour of trial; it was the Lord trying him to see what was in his heart; and he fell. Next time the struggle was fainter. The enemy got him at advantage, and now, he is as he is.

Take now one third picture. Look back at the good man. Follow him to the close of his life. Imagine yourself standing by him in that hour when his departure is at hand; that hour when Truth stands revealed; when all men speak truth, if ever;—the dying hour. Ask then the good man whether he is satisfied with the retrospect of his life. I do not know all that he will say to you; but I will answer for one sentence. "Had I to live over again," we seem to hear him

say, "I would be more sedulous in prayer. Now I see things in their proper magnitude, in their relative importance. Now I see, among the *treasures* of life, what is the one thing needful; now I see, among the *employments* of life, what is the one thing needful; had I to live over again, more time should be given to prayer."

To conclude. Those who hear me either are constant in that portion of Christian practice which I have been recommending, or they are not.

1. To those who, by God's grace, are thus constant, I only say, Go on in *fear*. For he is safest, who fears most. May the Divine power be present to "strengthen those that do stand." May they go from strength, "strong in the Lord and the power of His might." And (seeing that temptations surely await them still) may they be led to see more and more where their great strength lies; to put on the whole armour of God, that they may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

2. But if there are any among those who now hear me, whose interest in the remarks which have been offered is of another kind; if there

are any who are conscious of good resolutions, made in fervent earnestness of heart, and sealed with prayer, but *not kept*; I am not speaking now of reckless minds, of unclean livers, who run greedily the way of ruin, who glory in their shame, and to whom contrition is a forgotten thing; I speak of those,—there may be such among us—who have knelt, not once and again, but oftener than they can count, and poured out confessions and promises,—*such* confessions and *such* promises, as it seemed impossible that they should forget and violate; such earnestness and self-devotion, that if at the moment it had been declared to them how they should offend in the sequel, they would have recoiled at once, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" But the sequel *has* come, the hour of trial has come, and defeat come with it, defeat with all its evil brood of consequences, shame, misgiving, doubt, coldness, estrangement of heart from sacred things, fear, unholy fear, fear of the enemy, who has thrown us down so easily, fear of God's wrath, decaying sense of interest in His promises, disinclination to meet Him because we are naked, indifference stealing on us to His word, His house, His holy Table;—if ever this has

been the picture of one who yet would be ill described as an outcast, one to whom prayer was not unknown, and the Holy Scripture no sealed book;—let it be allowed the Christian teacher to look behind the veil of such a case, and to say what he sees. He sees, first, probably a want of clearness and decision in the original *grounds* of confidence. "I can do all things," said the suppliant, in the warmth of a confident devotion, but he forgot to add, or added in a feebler tone, and not in the power of a real conviction, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." Here probably will be found, in no slight degree, the history of his failure and disgrace. But secondly, how will his case stand the test of this question; Has there been no unfaithfulness touching the work of *secret prayer?* has not its time been intruded upon, been curtailed, or rudely thrust aside? If this has been so, we look no farther for the cause of his defection. He was found without his armour. Need we ask how it was that he could be wounded? Rather say, he was found without his strength; he was unfed in the morning. Shall we stop to ask how it was that he was weak, and the first onset threw him down? There was no vigour

in his limbs; and he had to do with an Enemy, who well knew how to take him in his hour of weakness. But now, if he sees the secret of his fall, he will learn also what is to be the secret of his strength in the time to come. It is, to return and hold fast to that which he did not hold fast to before, even to God's help. There are two forms of life; to live in self, and to live in prayer. The one is weakness, the other is strength. The one is defeat, the other is victory. But let it be remembered, the secret is to hold fast; to hold, and not to let go. There is an anchor for our soul. But we must hold fast to it. To let go is to drift. Leave it for a hand's breadth; and it is as foreign to you, as if a hemisphere of waters rolled between. But hold fast, and you are safe. Live in prayer, and you live in safety. "He that has learned to pray as he ought," said good Bishop Wilson, "has got the secret of a holy life[a]."

I have enlarged upon this topic, because I am sure that the Christian life is a very practical thing. Burning resolutions, enthusiastic acts of self-devotion, are not what is most characteristic of the Christian life. It finds its picture rather in that account which is

[a] Sacr. Priv. init.

left us of a primitive saint, who, it is said, "walked with God." To "walk with God," (I cannot bring myself to paraphrase the words;)—to "order our *steps* according to His word,"—not in fever, and clamour, and protest, but in the *ὑπομονὴ ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ*[1]:—to be obedient and faithful, and peculiarly in those secret portions of daily living, which no eye but the eye of God can see, and which for that very reason (as I suppose) are, when well performed, so peculiarly pleasing in His sight; this, rather, is the description of those who are now going the right road, and who at the last day shall be found on Christ's right hand. It was once my lot to see a paper, written by a student of this place, which told a tale of sorrow more eloquent than many sermons. This young man was irresolute and infirm of purpose. He had *wasted* his time. He saw his position; he poured himself out in an agony of remorse, and committed to writing his resolutions for the future. I believe no human soul is capable of feeling more determinate purpose than was expressed in that writing. I cannot go through the story. It was soon wound up; and the end was worst of all. Suffice it

[1] Rom. ii. 7.

here to say,—as I have spoken of his *resolution*,—that he did *not keep* his resolution. He resolved to be a new character; to be no longer slothful, idle, and wandering. All this he resolved, and fervently. It was found in written words. But no resolutions were found of what he would *do*. No plan for walking (like the Patriarch) with God. No chart of his day was found, in which the first hour was to be spent in private; in secret devotion, and in the reading of God's holy word; in "waiting on the Lord," that so, by God's grace, he might "renew his strength." This he forgot. He did not seize the moment, that golden moment of conviction, which if God gives once, He may not give again,—that moment, when the one evil spirit is dislodged, and the house untenanted, and the seven evil spirits are not yet returned to try for entrance,—alas for him! he did not seize the golden moment of conviction, to bind himself to *acts* of faithful service. This he did not. His sun set, if setting it might be called. It went down, and he was yet unreformed.

Brethren, be faithful, be rigid, be unbending in your fidelity to Almighty God. It may cost you a struggle; but there is a

pleasant land beyond; and the toil itself shall be sweeter than all the sinful indulgences of sloth and softness. I speak to you as to those who desire to walk with God. Whether there are any within these walls to whom the lessons of childhood are all but forgotten things,—who, while they are prayed for anxiously by others, pray but seldom for themselves,—God knows: if there are such, may they wake from their slumber before it is too late, and seek the better way. But I am speaking to you now, rather as to those who desire to learn the ways of God. And if among those who now hear me there are any to whom, in their warfare with themselves, it has been matter of astonishment, of perplexity, and confusion of face, that they made so little progress, who have been thrown down when they thought themselves strong, surprised and vanquished when all seemed safe and right; if there have been moments of terror and dismay when almost the spirit sunk and the hands fell down, and the cry broke forth, an exceeding bitter cry, "what then shall I do? what remains to be tried, what resource is there yet?"—let them be reminded, that there is *one* resource which they have not yet exhausted; "Hast thou

not known?" says the prophet; "hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary; and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that *wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength*; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Isaiah xl. 28—31.

APPENDIX

The writer would earnestly solicit attention to the two following documents.

1. Bp. Wilson's Sacra Privata, chap. i. "On Devotion and Prayer."

2. Law's Serious Call, chap. xiv.

Extract from the first.

"Make it a law to yourself to meditate before you pray."

Extract from the second.

"If you were to use yourself (as far as you can) to pray always in the same place; if you were to reserve that place for devotion, and not allow yourself to do any thing common in it; if you were never to be there yourself, but in times of devotion; if any little room, (or if that cannot be,) if any particular part of a room, was thus used, this kind of consecration of it, as a place holy unto God, would have an effect upon your mind, and dispose you to such tempers, as would very much assist your devotion. For by having a place thus sacred in your room, it would in some measure resemble a chapel or house of God. This would dispose you to be always in the spirit of religion, when you were there; and fill you with wise and holy thoughts, when you were by yourself. Your own apartment would rise in your mind such sentiments, as you have, when you stand near an altar; and you will be afraid of thinking or doing any thing that was foolish near that place, which is the place of prayer, and holy intercourse with God."

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